

1-1-2006

## UA77/1 A Century of Spirit - Athletics

Western Kentucky University

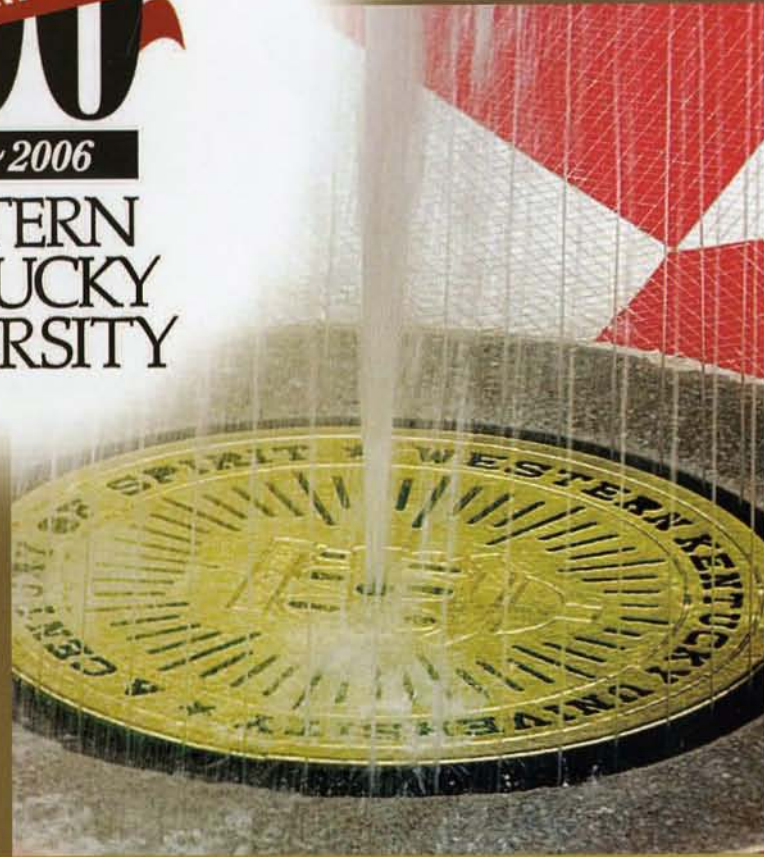
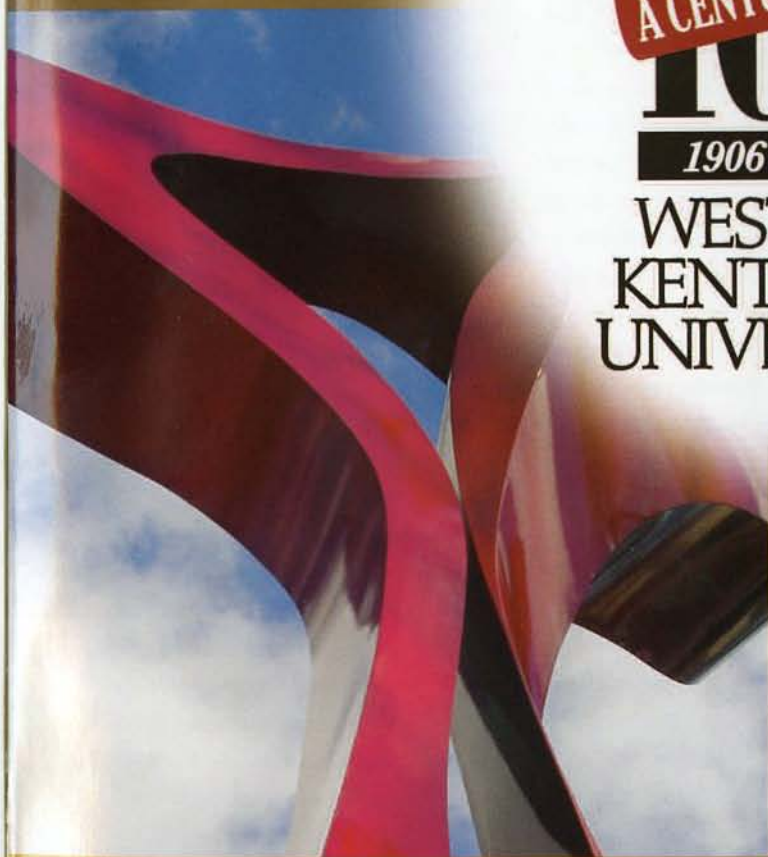
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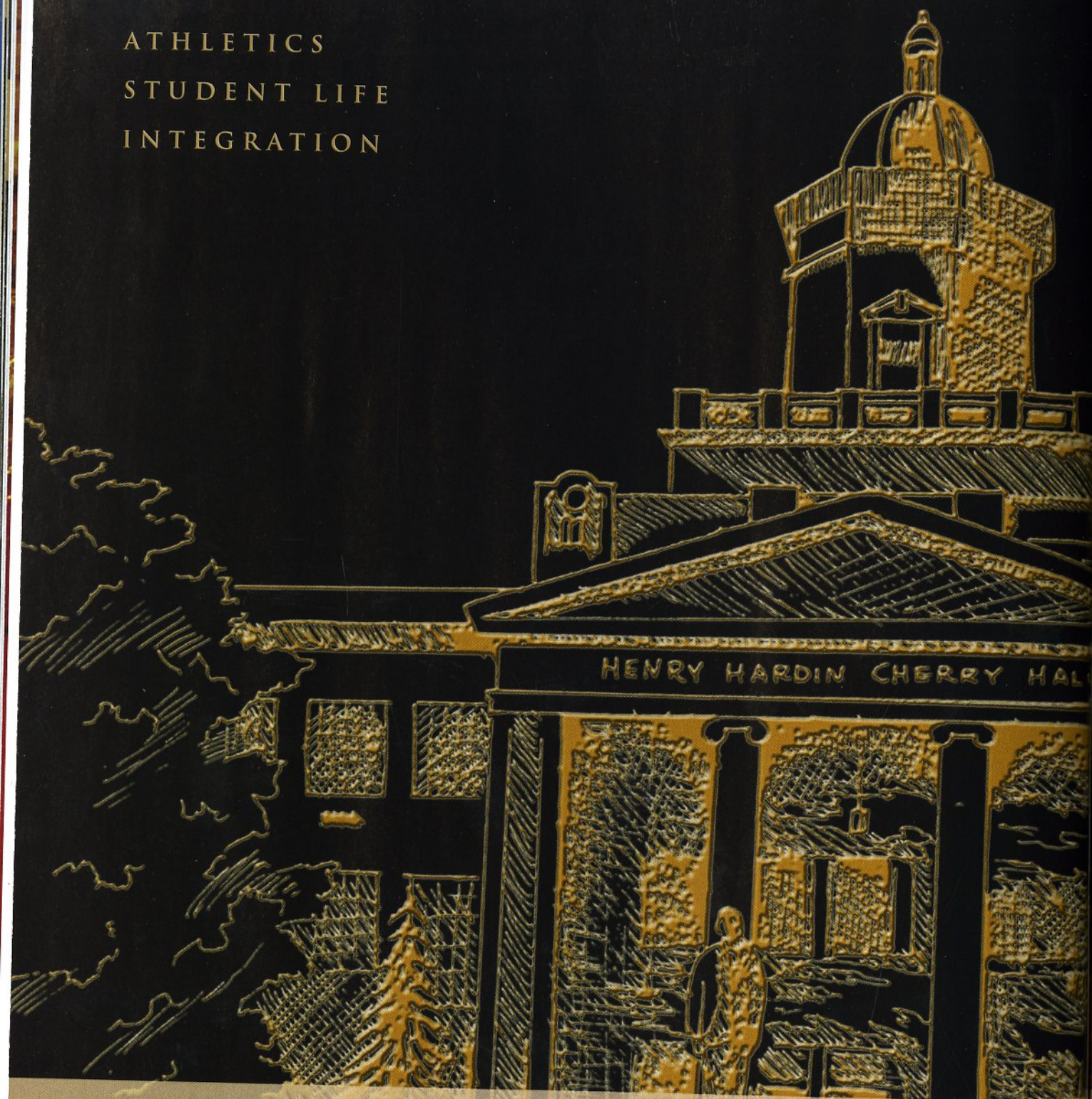
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A CENTURY OF SPIRIT  
WKU SPIRIT COMMEMORATIVE EDITION

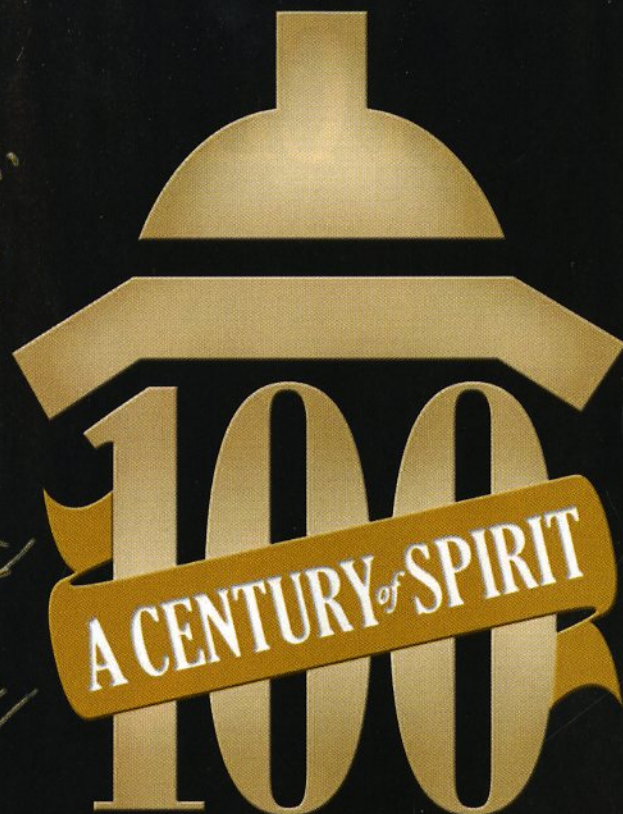


ATHLETICS  
STUDENT LIFE  
INTEGRATION



CENT





1906 ~ 2006

WESTERN  
KENTUCKY  
UNIVERSITY

ENNIAL

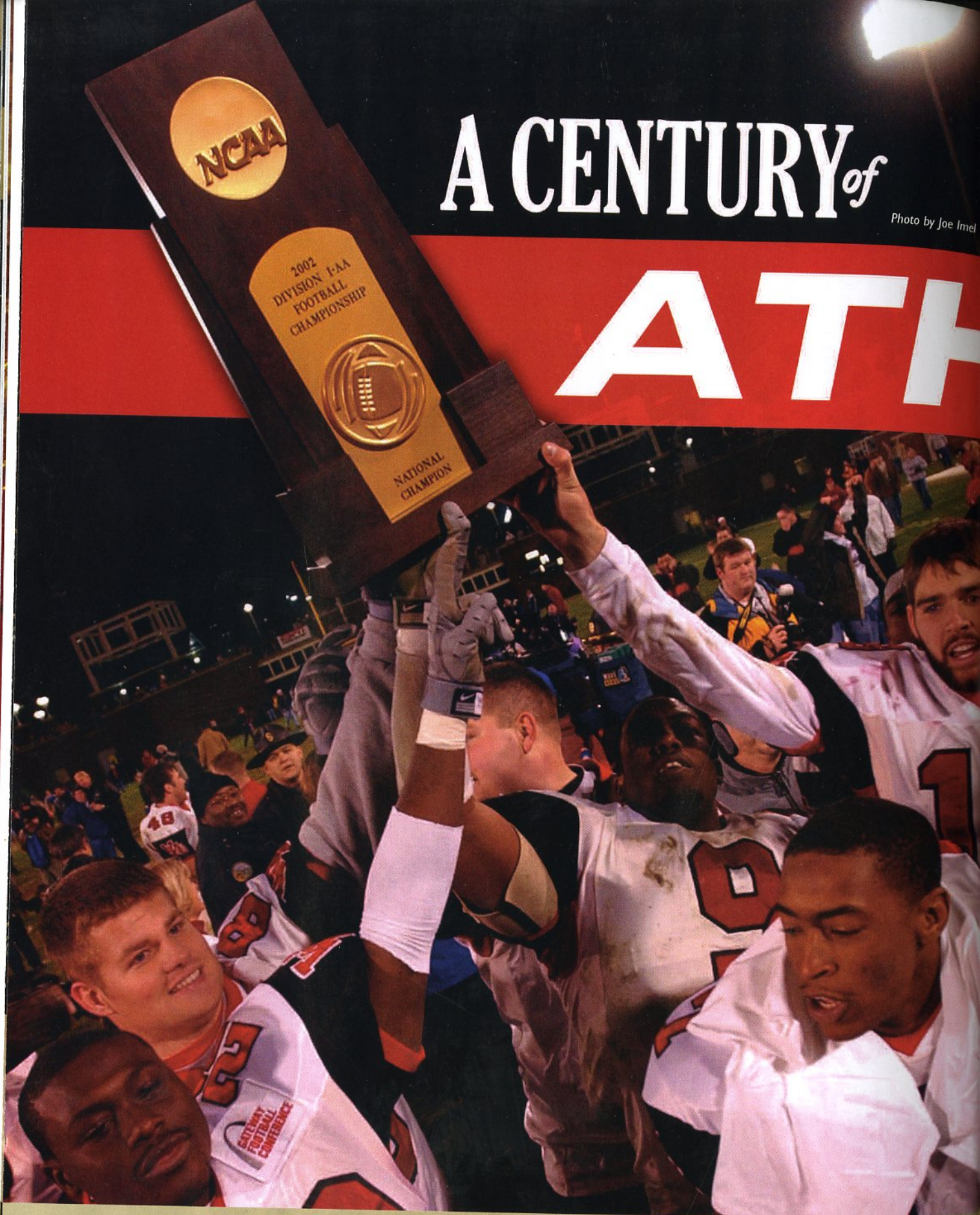
Illustration by Charles "Chuck" Crume, Jr. '71, '80



# A CENTURY<sup>of</sup>

Photo by Joe Imel

# ATH



# CENTENNIAL



# ILETICS



By Paul Just

People. Good people. At Western Kentucky University, people who have taken to heart one of our founding father Henry Hardin Cherry's favorite lines — *The Spirit Makes The Master!*

People — The people (athletes, coaches, and, yes, students, faculty and fans as well) who have made WKU athletics a rallying point and a source of genuine pride for all those who have come this way.

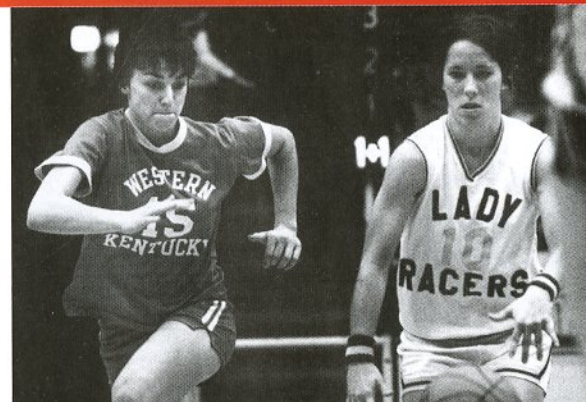


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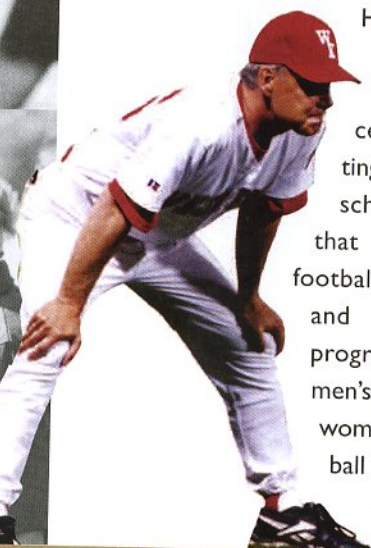
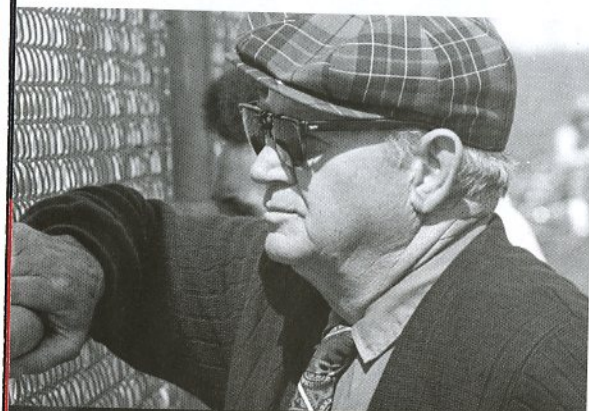
Photos provided by Office of Athletic Media Relations

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WKU SPIRIT

COMMEMORATIVE EDITION





But, the history of that athletic program goes back to just one man, the president who originally preferred "nature excursions" to football. But, Dr. Cherry was also a practical man. When he discovered that schools were gaining publicity and attracting students through athletics, he was determined that his Western Kentucky State Normal School would enter the fray — and not just participate, but compete successfully!

The faculty approved and the first intercollegiate event took place May 2, 1910. Western hosted Eastern State Normal in baseball and the Western men won 6-0. The pitcher, Greer (first name unknown), unwittingly launched the rich tradition of what would become Hilltopper athletics with an impressive no-hitter!

Western's first championship followed in 1913, when the 14-2 Normal diamond team was the "Champion School Team of Kentucky."

Football first appeared in 1913 and then athletics at Western made a big step forward in 1914 with the hiring of its first full-time coach, J.L. Arthur. He spent two-and-a-half years on The

Hill, continuing baseball's successes; putting together a schedule for that fledgling football program; and beginning programs in men's basketball, women's basketball and track — laying

the foundation for what was to be!

A school publication reported in June 1915, that "The future of athletics in the Normal is dazzling." Prophetic, to be sure!

It was dazzling, indeed. Following a suspension of the athletic program during World War I, things began to return to normal in 1920 and sports began a storied journey toward greatness.

### People —The coaches.

Dr. Cherry convinced E.A. Diddle to leave nearby Greenville High School and come to The Hill to direct the athletic program in 1922 and, as they say, "the rest is history."

In his remarkable 42-year career, Diddle coached Western athletes in 1,532 contests, posting an overall 1,040-487-5 record. His 1922-23 women's basketball team earned him his first championship, winning the state title. He coached football for seven seasons and saw his 1928 club go 8-1 to win the state championship. He coached baseball for 35 seasons winning 60 percent of his games.

Diddle also coached Hilltopper basketball. When Diddle retired in 1964, he had won 759 games, a victory total unsurpassed in college basketball history at the time.

Meanwhile, in the early-to-mid-1920s, the teams that represented the school on The Hill came to be known by the distinctive nickname "Hilltoppers."

From that core, track returned in 1930, the same year that women's basketball was dropped. Tennis was added in 1931, followed by golf in 1935, cross country in 1962, and



riflery and swimming in 1969.

Women's sports ended their 43-year hiatus in the 1973-74 school year when WKU fielded teams in basketball, gymnastics, tennis and track/cross country; golf was added in 1976. Gymnastics fell to the wayside in 1981 and was replaced by volleyball.

Men's soccer became a varsity sport in 1982 and riflery was dropped in '84.

Finally, women's swimming came on the scene in 1997 followed by softball in 2000 and women's soccer in '01, running WKU athletics' program to 20 intercollegiate sports.

Along the way, a bevy of other talented coaches added their special touch to Hilltopper athletics.

Bill Powell founded the swimming program in 1969 and retired 36 years later as the second winningest NCAA Division I men's coach in history!

Add well-known Hilltopper and Lady Topper coaches like Jimmy Feix (football 1968-83), John Oldham (men's basketball 1964-71; followed by 15 years as the athletics director), Paul Sanderford (women's basketball 1982-97), Joel Murrie (baseball 1980-05), Jack Harbaugh (football 1989-02), Ted Hornback (men's tennis 1939-42, '46-47 and '49-76), Frank Griffin (men's golf 1946-78), Dr. Curtiss Long (track and cross country 1980-to date), Jim Richards (men's basketball 1971-78 and men's golf 1978-86), Travis Hudson (volleyball 1995-to date), Dr. Burch Oglesby (track 1966-71), Tom Ecker (track and cross-country 1962-66), Dr. Charlie Daniel (vol-

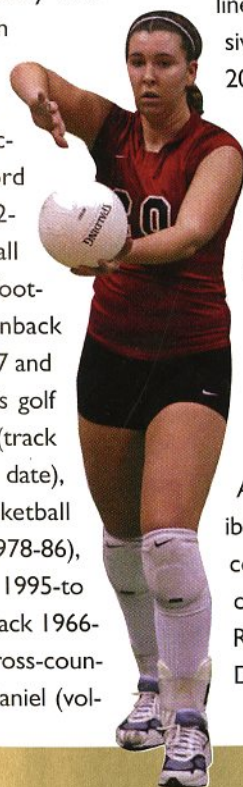
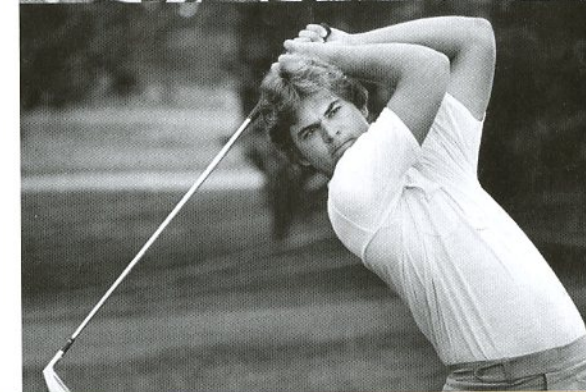
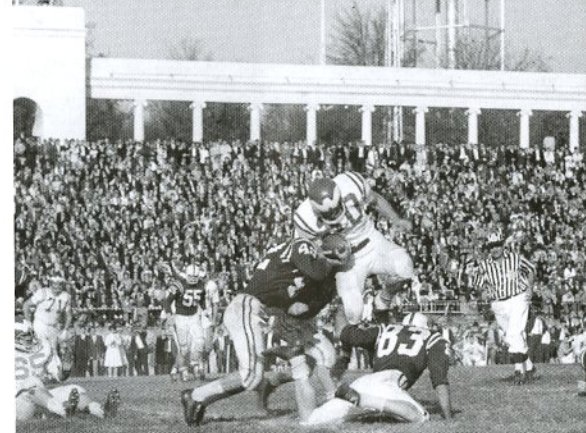
leyball 1981-89), David Holmes (men's soccer 1980-to date), Jeff True (tennis 1982-89 and 1995-to date), and many others who each made their mark on WKU athletics through the years.

**The People — as Mr. Diddle pointed out in that distinctive voice of his, "ya gotta have da play'urs!"**

Athletes like Western's first All-American, basketball center William "Red" McCrocklin in 1938, were followed by dozens more including consensus All-Americans Tom Marshall (1954), Clem Haskins (1967) and Jim McDaniels (1971); all the way up to Nigel Dixon and Mike Wells in 2004. Women's basketball has also had its share of All-America athletes led by consensus pick Lillie Mason (1986).

And, there were football All-Americans from the first, quarterback Jimmy Feix in 1952, to the most recent — Placekicker Chris James, offensive lineman Erik Losey and defensive back Antonio Thomas in 2005. Along the way, the long list of Topper gridiron All-Americans included four consensus picks — defensive back Bobby Sippio in 2000, defensive back Mel Mitchell in '01, offensive lineman Chris Price in '02, and offensive lineman Buster Ashley in both '03 and '04.

There were also great All-America and Olympic caliber athletes in track and cross country — including cross country national champs Nick Rose (1974) and Sean Dollman (1991) — along with







baseball and swimming (notably 1985 All-American Steve Crocker, the first alternate for the Olympics twice and the world record holder in the 50 short course) standouts. And, although WKU no longer fields teams in their sports, former Topper athletes Sue Lausten (rifery) and Adele Gleaves (gymnastics) won national championships in 1970 and '73, respectively.

The African-American athlete first came on the scene on The Hill in the 1963-64 school year. Vincent Shelby, who actually came to Western in the fall of 1962, joined the football team and became the first African-American to earn a Topper varsity letter when he was awarded the first of his three letters in '63. Newcomers on The Hill that fall included black athletes Clem Haskins and Dwight Smith (basketball), Jim Malone (tennis) and Roy Turner (track), who all enjoyed outstanding athlete careers as Hilltoppers.

### And, the championships.

In 34 seasons in the Ohio Valley Conference (1948-82), Western Kentucky athletes won a total of 82 league championships in nine different sports while also taking the conference All-Sports Trophy on 12 of 20 occasions.

Then, in 1982, Western left the OVC to join the Sun Belt Conference. WKU quickly established itself as a contender for the SBC's all-sports championship, the Vic Bubas Cup. By 1987, Hilltopper athletics had won its first Cup and WKU athletes have annually been prime contenders for the award tak-

ing top honors again in 2003 and '04. Now, in its 25th year in the Sun Belt, Western owns 56 league team championships in 10 different sports.

### Finally, the moments.

In addition to the highlights listed above, there were so many great moments, including:

- becoming the first NCAA school to win 30 basketball games (the '37-38 Hilltoppers were 30-3)
- the near-miss in the 1942 NIT national championship game (a two-point loss to West Virginia)
- Dee Gibson ending his four-year tennis career on The Hill undefeated in singles play with four KIAC titles
- the 1948 basketball team — complete with five athletes who earned All-America recognition during their careers at Western — posting the best record in the nation (28-2)
- the 1952 football team reaching Western's first post-season game and celebrating with a bowl victory
- Roger Otten winning his fourth straight (1950-53) OVC tennis championship at No. 1 singles
- the 1963 gridiron team going 10-0-1 and winning the Tangerine Bowl
- Henry Jackson (long jump) and Bob Stoltzman (discus) becoming WKU's first track All-Americans in 1970
- the 1971 basketball team's run to the NCAA Final Four



- the 1973 football team finishing as the runner-up in the first-ever NCAA national championship playoff
- the '74 cross country team finishing runner-up in the NCAA meet
- the 1975 footballers returning to the national title game
- the 1980 baseball team narrowly missing a trip to the College World Series
- the '85 Lady Topper basketball team making its first appearance in the Final Four
- the 1986 Lady Toppers returning to the Final Four
- the Lady Toppers' appearance in the 1992 NCAA Women's Basketball National Championship Game
- the '02 football team's rebound from a 2-3 mark to win 10 in a row and the NCAA I-AA National Championship
- Lady Topper swimming totally dominating the early years of the sport in the Sun Belt sweeping the first five (2001-05) league championships
- and the 2004 baseball team's surprising run through the Sun Belt Tournament and into the NCAA Tournament!

And, now, with 20 sports and more than 400 student athletes on The Hill, WKU athletics stands poised to see its people continue making an impact on the collegiate athletic scene for many, many years

to come.

Dr. Cherry and Mr. Diddle would be pleased!

### Notes

- Thanks to Dr. Lowell Harrison's history of Western Kentucky University; Dr. Kelly Thompson's 1943 master's thesis on Western athletic records; and the resources of the University Archives and the Office of Athletic Media Relations.
- Our apologies to the hundreds of Western athletes and dozens of coaches and WKU teams that space did not permit us to mention. We know that each and every one of you made his/her own contributions to Hilltopper athletics and we thank you!

